

## **MOUNT GRAFTON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 73,216 acres**

The Mount Grafton WSA (NV-040-169) is located in east-central Nevada, in White Pine and Lincoln Counties, approximately 30 miles south of Ely, Nevada. The WSA includes 73,216 acres of public land and five privately owned inholdings totalling 280 acres .

The boundaries of the WSA are a complex combination of lines drawn along roads, private land, contour lines and natural features. The northern boundary of the unit follows a legal line, a fenceline, the 7,400-foot contour line, several natural features and the Cattle Camp Wash Road. The eastern boundary is formed by the Lake Valley Summit Road and a series of inter-connected fencelines and jeep trails which traverse the eastern bench. The southern boundary is formed by old mining roads and scars north of Patterson Pass. The southwestern boundary traverses the alluvial bench to the north and for the most part is defined by private land and jeep trails. The Cave Valley Road forms the west boundary of the unit.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 30,115 acres recommended for wilderness 43,101 acres recommended for nonwilderness**

Mount Grafton itself, at 10,990 feet, is the tallest peak on BLM-administered land in Nevada. These highly scenic mountains of the Schell Creek Range are rugged with numerous rock outcrops, crags and peaks scattered throughout the high country. Public support was strong during the study process and during the formal review of the draft wilderness EIS. It has also long been one of the more popular areas in the region among outdoor recreationists. The diversity and the quality of these recreation opportunities are outstanding and led to the recommendation to designate a portion of the WSA as wilderness.

Every feature of the WSA is on a large scale, its three major peaks being the last to hold snow in the late spring, the first to carry snow in autumn. From the peaks, the view of surrounding valleys and mountains is expansive and contributes to the exhilaration that is a definite part of the experience of ridgeline hiking. Wildlife is abundant: Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mule deer, elk, raptors, and mountain lions are among the many species in the area. Extensive forested areas include pinyon, juniper, aspen, limber and bristlecone pine, and white fir.

Also supporting the recommendation is the striking absence of manmade intrusions and the very naturalness of the area. The richness of the natural environment along with its size makes for outstanding opportunities for solitude. Excellent screening is provided by the massive landform and by the dense woodland over much of the mountain range.

Designation of this portion of the WSA as wilderness would serve to protect most of the high wilderness values, while minimizing the conflicts with other resources. Some conflicts associated with mineral potential do remain. Although potential exists, it is not anticipated that any mineral production would occur in the foreseeable future.

Portion A was not recommended due to lower wilderness values, the presence of a crested wheatgrass seeding, several stock reservoirs and cherrystemmed routes.

Portion B was not recommended for wilderness due to numerous cherrystemmed roads and ways totaling about 10 miles, a bladed fenceline, two diversion ditches and the ruins of an abandoned tramway. This portion also includes the area near the Deer Trail Mine where numerous mining prospects are scattered along the hillsides.

Portion C was not recommended for wilderness due to mineral information provided by the 1983 GEM study. The mineral potential of this area is sufficient to emphasize management of this area to maintain access for mineral exploration.

Portion D was not recommended for wilderness because of manageability concerns with the five parcels of private lands scattered throughout the area as well as mineral potential. Several of the private parcels have no current access and any attempt to create a road to them would be highly visible. Maintaining access to this area for mineral exploration is emphasized.

Portion E on the north end of the WSA was excluded because of the presence of many unnatural features including crested wheatgrass seedings, stock reservoirs, as well as many miles of fences and jeep trails. In addition, approximately 5 miles of the northern boundary is not based on easily seen features on the ground and this lack of identification is considered a manageability concern.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The Mount Grafton WSA is in a natural condition. The WSA's large size and dissected topography has served to confine intrusions to the lower elevations. The high degree of naturalness within the WSA has been recognized with the designation of two scenic areas within the unit - the Mount Grafton and North Creek Scenic Areas. The suitable core of the area is nearly pristine. Here, creeks rush down through aspen groves, elk wander in high meadows and bristlecone pine cling to rocky faces. Only portions of five primitive cherrystemmed routes can be found within this area and they are very unobtrusive.

**B. Solitude:** Opportunities for solitude in the Mount Grafton WSA are outstanding. The sheer size of the area alone makes for good opportunities. Combined with this are the excellent topographic screening with many side canyons and large rock outcrops; and excellent vegetative screening from dense pinyon-juniper stands and large stands of aspen and fir.

The benchlands in areas A, B, and D have lower quality opportunities for solitude than the remainder of the WSA. Overall, both the topographic and the vegetative screening on the benches is somewhat less than in the mountains and fewer secluded areas can be found.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Outstanding opportunities for recreation exist in the Mount Grafton WSA due to a combination of good diversity and a high quality of opportunities. Hiking, camping, and backpacking opportunities are excellent on the ridgeline where the scenic vistas both outside and within the WSA are awe-inspiring. The North Creek area on the east side of the WSA is a large riparian zone with abundant fauna and flora. The creek is one of only a few perennial streams with a fishery entirely on BLM-administered land in the Ely District. Other types of recreation possible in the WSA include trapping, hunting, rock climbing, photography, and fishing at North Creek and Geyser Creek. The quality of these opportunities generally diminishes as the elevation decreases. Recreation opportunities are lowest on the benchlands where the vegetation, wildlife, and scenery is least varied.

**D. Special Features:** The high scenic value of the WSA is considered to be a special feature. Many factors contribute to the scenic values including the massiveness of the landform; the alternating open and forested areas with their different and contrasting colors and textures provided by talus fields, grass meadows, rock outcrops, and bright fall colors of large aspen stands. The North Creek and Mount Grafton scenic areas are formally designated areas which partially lie within the WSA.

### **4. MANAGEABILITY** (the area must be capable of being managed to preserve its wilderness character)

The portion of the Mount Grafton WSA recommended for wilderness is manageable with little cost or effort due

to the exclusion of benchland areas which contain most of the roads, ways, range developments and private lands.

Portions A through C would be manageable as wilderness. The crested wheatgrass seedings and other range developments in these portions would require periodic mechanical maintenance. While temporarily impacting wilderness values in the vicinity during the needed maintenance, wilderness values would not be greatly lessened by these efforts.

While not rendering the entire Portion D unmanageable, the two private parcels with no current access do create a management concern.

Portion E would not be manageable with the current boundary. Approximately 5 miles of this northern boundary is poorly defined on the ground. The crested wheatgrass seedings and other range developments in this portion would require periodic mechanical maintenance. While temporarily impacting wilderness values in the vicinity during the needed maintenance, wilderness values would not be greatly lessened by these efforts.

## **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

The report identifies the majority of the area recommended for wilderness as having low potential for mineral resources. Three areas on the periphery of the unit were identified as having moderate potential. On the northwest periphery of the study area, moderate potential for gold and silver occurring in vein deposits was identified. The eastern portion of the unit was identified as having moderate potential for silver and tungsten.

The southern portion of the unit which borders the Patterson Mining District was identified as having moderate potential for tungsten, lead, zinc, silver, gold and fluorite in hydrothermal veins or replacement deposits. A small zone within the moderate potential area was identified as having high potential for tungsten, zinc and copper metals. Development of mineral resources is not anticipated

The energy resource (oil and gas) potential was rated as low for the Mount Grafton WSA. Geothermal resource potential for the WSA was also rated as low.

## **6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

During formal public review of the draft EIS and Wilderness Technical Report held between April 8 to July 8, 1983 a total of 41 comments were received specifically addressing the Mount Grafton WSA. Of those, 32 were written comments and 9 were oral testimonies. In general, 35 commentators supported wilderness designation for all or part of the WSA, 5 commentators supported no wilderness for the WSA while one commentator mentioned the Mount Grafton WSA but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Mines, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, and the Department of the Air Force all commented on the draft EIS. None of these agencies had a jurisdictional conflict with any of the alternatives. The Governor of Nevada as well as the State Divisions of State Lands, Parks, Forestry, and Historic Preservation and Archeology, Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Lincoln County Conservation District supported a no wilderness recommendation because of old tungsten mining sites, the presence of roads and ways, and a concern that access for wildlife management could be curtailed.

One letter was received on the final EIS from the Environmental Protection Agency which supported the BLM's wilderness recommendation.